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Intended for newspaper managing editors, this collection of articles discusses the following topics: (1) prescriptions to keep America's P.M. dailies healthy and thriving, (2) pagination, (3) cable operations and videotext, (4) basic ways to insure the future of P.M. newspapers, (5) hawking newspapers, (6) staffing round-the-clock, (7) the growing numbers afternoon newspapers and how they do it, and (8) increased interest in reading pleasure. (EL)

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Afternoon Delight

A report of the APME
P.M. Newspaper Committee
Louisville, Kentucky 1983

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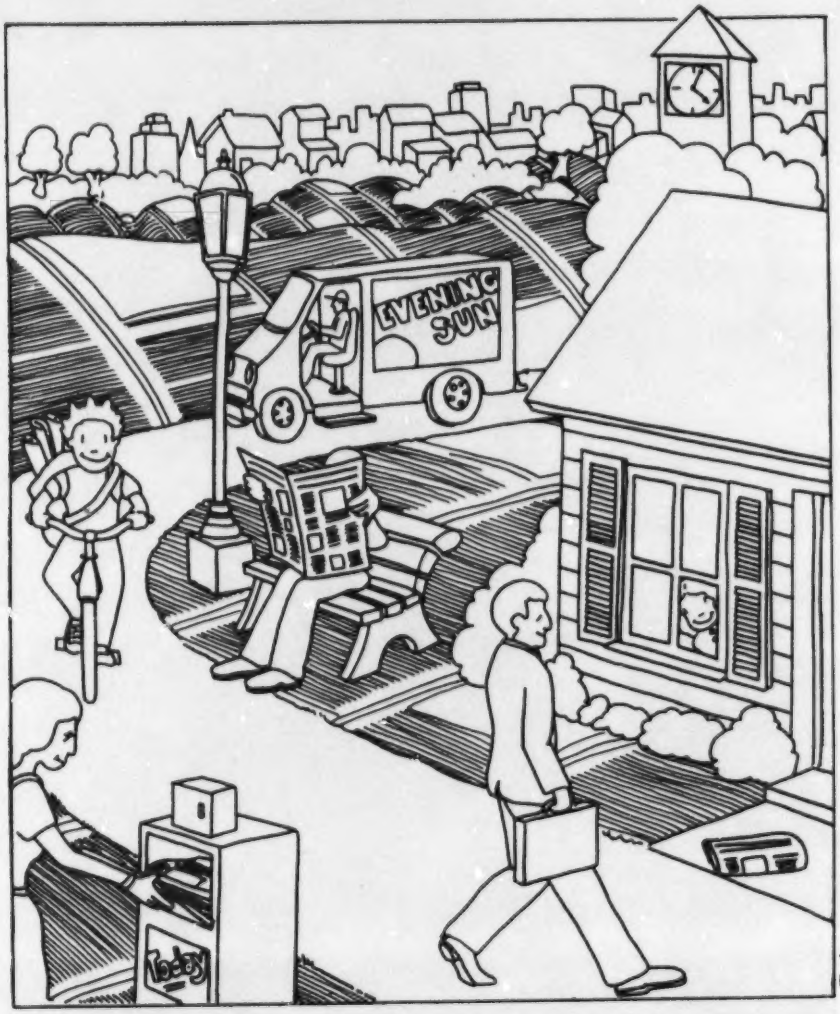

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Afternoon Delight

GRAPHIC BY PAUL CARBO

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This report was compiled by the staff of the *Reno Gazette-Journal*

Prescriptions to keep America's P.M. dailies healthy and thriving

By Dave Zeeck
The Kansas City Star

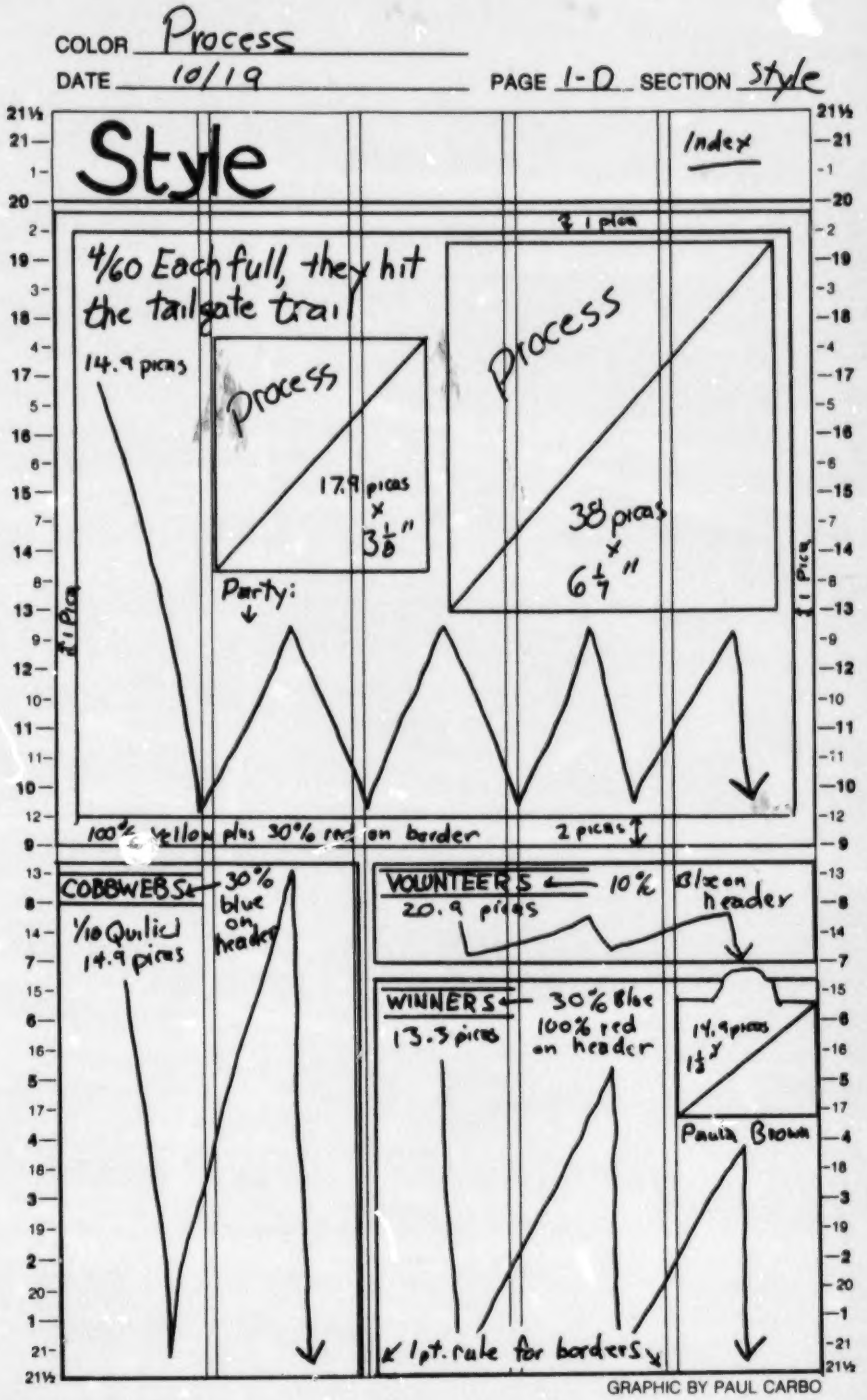
Predicting the future is a risky business, particularly when one is dealing with afternoon newspapers and the most recent decade in their history.

But there are places to look for the future of P.M.'s — for prescriptions to keep an afternoon paper healthy and profitable. Those places are dotted across America where afternoon papers now thrive and where others are gambling that they have found the combination of formula that will retain or increase their success.

What this report does is look at three areas — pagination, cable/video approaches to newspapering, and content/design strategies — to see if any or all of them hold promise for afternoon papers in the next decade.

The answers are ambiguous in the sense that none is definitive or applicable to all papers in all situations. But there are afternoon papers across the country working hard in each of these areas – successfully so — making themselves better, stronger and more appealing to readers.

In that there are lessons for us all.



GRAPHIC BY PAUL CARBO

David A. Zeeck, managing editor of the Kansas City Star, is responsible for producing this package of three reports. Other members of the Star's staff — Pam Johnson, Roger Moore, John Wylie and Frank Conet — made substantial contributions to the effort.

Pagination puts everything in place

Pagination is one of today's many technological bywords in our industry.

It's also one that should particularly encourage afternoon newspaper editors over the next decade, say equipment manufacturers and the pioneering editors who have furrowed the field for the rest of us.

Why? Because pagination is a development that, in the coming years, promises important benefits especially for beleaguered P.M. papers:

☐ Added deadline time that can produce a page of fresh-breaking news in a few minutes.

☐ Control over and flexibility in a newspaper's appearance. That control is especially important for last-minute live-news pages that can roll off the presses with jumbled paragraphs or bad jumps that are caused, in part, by the way we now typeset and compose our papers.

☐ In exchange for the cost of pagination, current users say they are reaping significant savings or will be soon on labor, materials and time in their backshops — another factor important to a paper whatever its cycle, but especially critical to P.M.s in competetive markets.

While these are plusses for any newspaper, afternoon publications should look favorably on any development that promises to diminish the various disadvantages they confront daily, the most pronounced being the ability to patch in fresh stories on excruciatingly short deadlines.

Pagination has been talked abou. and discussed long enough now that everyone knows it requires a considerable investment.

The *Pasadena Star News*, generally considered to have the most complete operation so far, invested $2 million two years ago for its pagination system.

Although the concept has been floating around for several years, the "P" in pagination today still represents potential more than it does proof. That's chiefly because a relatively few number of newspapers have ventured into the new technology. Of those, the *Pasadena Star News*, a morning paper, has had the most extensive and successful use so far. The editors there say they have saved 30 minutes on copy deadlines and at least an hour on photo deadlines.

In Utica, which is about a year into its system, the paper has not gained time yet. But Tony Vella, managing editor of the afternoon *Observer-Dispatch*, says he anticipates that within the year and perhaps in a matter of months the news and photo deadlines may gain 30 minutes.

Vella said virtually all pages are now paginated, both ads and news, which amounts to 24 to 26 daily.

It's a lot harder right now, Vella said, to redo pages for late stories. But, he said, "I know the system is good, know that it will be helpful. We just need to get over the hump."

Besides the added deadline time, editors in Greenville, S.C.; Newport News, Va.; Pasadena; Utica and Westchester emphasize the importance of gaining control over the quality of the news pages.

They say that the preciseness of pagination means stories are no longer at the mercy of hasty cuts in the composition room. There seldom are surprises at the last minute with gaping holes on pages or inches long run-overs. X-Acto knives don't slip into typeset copy at the last minute. Leading is even. Type is straight on the page. The overall look is more polished. There is the ability to tinker with a layout until it looks just right.

Without hesitation, Edie McLaurin, news editor of the afternoon *Greenville Piedmont*, summed up of what many of the editors experienced in pagination expressed:

"It has made us a better paper."

Along with that control comes an increased workload for editors, chiefly those on the copy desk. Some papers have added editors, but not enough to offset the major savings they are experiencing in their composing rooms.

In Newport News, for example, the copy desk was expanded by about 15 percent, but the savings in the back shop have amounted to about 60 percent, And those savings, according to managing editor Myrtle Barnes of the afternoon *Times-Herald*, helped the company make additional improvements, particularly the purchase of a new offset press.

But what's the truest test of pagination's promise for P.M.s from an editor's view? Getting that big late-breaking story into your afternoon paper, avoiding the frustration of knowing your readers are having to turn to TV news to get details of the major story of the day.

Pasadena was still publishing in the afternoon when it introduced pagination. The "proof" of pagination's promise for afternoon papers came one day in those early months.

A young girl had disappeared at a shopping plaza several days before and the story had been of high-interest in the community. The latest development had been a search one morning of a nearby dump. That was the story that was in the paper that afternoon. At 12:30 p.m., the reporter at the site of the search called the newsroom with the biggest development of all. The girl's body had been found. The news editor and another editor redid the story at one of the makeup stations.

The story made all editions. Without pagination, the readers would have had to get the news elsewhere.

Whatever we do to get late news to afternoon readers, there is another important side to the coin: Readers want their paper on time.

Tom Holbein, executive vice president of Belden Associates, says that readers don't give much ground on that issue when talking to researchers.

"Generally, readers of P.M. newspapers tell us that they would prefer their paper on time or earlier, even doing without a late-breaking story."

"But," Holbein added, "obviously pagination might enable P.M.s to deliver the best of both worlds."

We need to look at cable, videotext

As P.M.s continue the search for ways to succeed and prosper, a growing number are focusing on electronic publishing.

Producing and distributing information by means other than the printing press is, according to most industry forecasters, what newspapers must be ready to do.

But *Videotex*, *Viewdata* (the British version), *Cabletext*, *Teletext*, *Telidon* (the Canadian version), *Antiope* (the French version), *Prestel* (the refined British version) aren't the only alternatives.

An increasing number of papers are also exploring cablevision, over-the-air subscription television, low-power television and direct broadcast satellites — all of which are expected to be the watchwords of the next decade's successful newspapers.

Cable operations have captured the greatest amount of industry attention recently. And the statistics available on cable growth are impressive: at the end of 1982 there were about 25 million basic cable subscribers, which comprised about 30 percent of all U.S. households with television. By 1986, cable is expected to be in well over 40 percent of all television households in the country.

Already the country's largest P.M., *Newsday*, has launched what has become the biggest newspaper-cable venture in the country.

A 24-hour-a-day operation, *Newsday Channel*, according to Bob Greene (the Pulitzer Prize winning editor who anchors a one-hour news show on the channel), took "state-of-the-art electronics" and wrapped it into "the traditions of a great paper."

The reasons are important to any editor or publisher, and they boil down to real essentials: it may be where our future readers are going and it stands to be extremely profitable. Each reason is important, but doubly so for P.M. newspapers.

A cablevision viewer profile last year by Urban and Associates, Inc., showed the persons most likely to use cable correspond closely to the type of person any P.M. would want. The research firm found, for example, that 47 percent of cable subscribers are 35 to 54 years old, 83 percent are married, more than 25 percent have a college degree or advanced degrees, 88 percent are homeowners 50 percent are professionals and managers, 40 percent of cablevision households have incomes of $30,000-plus and almost half of the households have four or more members.

That profiled-viewer, according to the experts, is primarily responsible for the $16 billion spent in 1980 by U.S. households on printed matter — newspapers, books and magazines (in effect, our readers).

And, according to Claude R. Smith, president of the HomServ, Inc., (a firm which coordinates financial and shopping transaction services), newspaper publishers had best take note on how to take advantage of videotext and cable. "Videotext will almost certainly have an impact," on the industry and its multibillion-dollar earnings potential.

At the 1982 United Press International annual EDICON conference, Smith warned that newspapers were "perhaps the most vulnerable medium to videotext substitution."

"Videotext timeliness and freedom from space contraints are significant competitive advantages over conventional newspapers," he said, noting newspapers should concentrate on using cable systems for sports, theatre listings, entertainment locally oriented data, classified and display advertising.

But, Smith said, the marriage of newspaper publishing and cable "can overcome most any threat."

Some newspapers are breaking new ground.

☐ *Newsday* — as does the *Des Moines Register Tribune* — writes, produces and telecasts a nightly news show from the newsroom. At both papers, the editorial staff is used for the productions. And in many cases, the shows, especially for such special events as elections, give commercial network stations a run for their money when it comes to local ratings.

The *Newsday* channel has combined video and text operations to put together news shows, lifestyle programming, editorial and advertising offers, such as homes for sale, help wanted ads and hourly stock market updates. It is effectively using video with text on all aspects of its programming — from news to advertising, officials there say.

☐ Joseph Cole, general manager of the *Arizona Republic* and *Phoenix Gazette* Cable Division, said of the about 80 electronic publishing operations in the country (as of late last year) some are experimental and others are large business ventures.

"The ventures," he said, "range from installing a TV camera in the newsroom and reading one and one-half minutes of news headlines every hour on Cable News Network or the local cable system to the sophisticated videotext efforts of Knight-Ridder's *Viewtron* and *Times-Mirror's* test in Southern California."

The Arizona operation, he reports, is involved in cabletext — providing text programming on cable systems in that market, classified advertising, and a magazine style program of local news, which is zoned to the suburban

community served by the cable system being used.

Times-Mirror set the industry pace a few years ago with a sophisticated two-way cable system that allowed viewers to select the latest news stories from an index and call them up on their home screens and order merchandise directly. Teletext is now being viewed by *Newsday* as a less expensive and less cumbersome system to do almost the same things, at least in the area of selecting news, reviews and features.

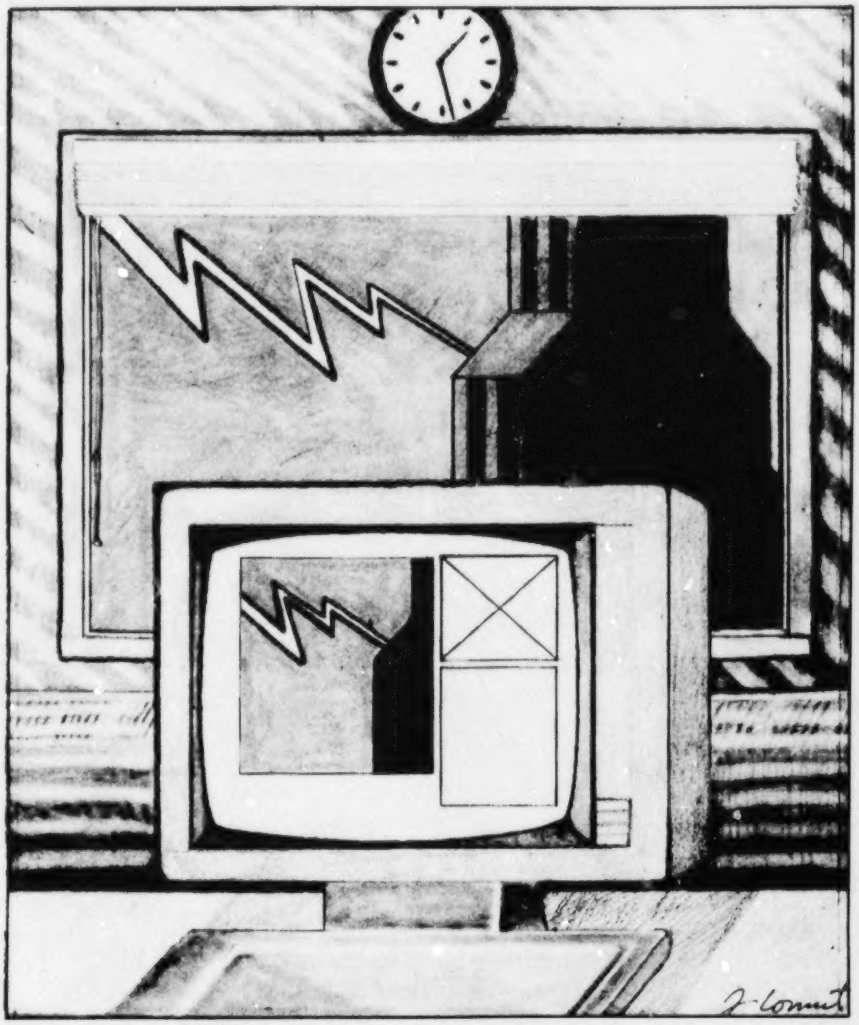
And Robert M. Johnson, *Newsday* president, predicts fully interactive videotex systems are only five to seven years away. His newspaper predicts, in addition, that some form of two-way video systems by the end of the decade will be in as many as half of all American homes.

To date, according to the American Newspaper Publishers Association, about 35 newspapers (ranging from the *Providence Journal* to the *Florida Times Union*) have cable-video programing and another 100 have ventures in the works.

What these newspapers are doing, in a very basic sense, is getting into a market that likely — within the next decade — will become a widespread two-way video system present in most American homes.

Each newspaper then can view electronic publishing as a way of protecting revenue. But, even more basic and important, the papers will find themselves in a business that will help them promote their "printed" product in a majority of American households.

And that kind of advertising, say the officials of such electronic-venturesome papers as *Newsday*, can translate into increased circulation and a breath of fresh air for this country's evening newspapers.



Basics help keep the reader tuned

GRAPHIC BY PAUL CARBO

Stuart Schwartz and Stewart Spencer agree that any general obituary for P.M. newspapers is distinctly premature.

But their visions of prosperity over the next decade are starkly different. Spencer, executive editor of The *News-Sentinel* in Fort Wayne, Inc., stresses basics.

"We are the dominant newspaper in the market . . . and we aim to continue to be," he said of the 65,000-circulation Knight-Ridder afternoon daily, which he says holds a circulation edge of about 6,000 copies over its A.M. competition.

He said the death of P.M.s in some markets should not be seen as a national trend:

"In the Midwest, the P.M. tradition is quite strong."

His advice for keeping that tradition strong: "Before considering unorthodox approaches, I feel we need a newspaper that does a good job of doing what a newspaper ought to do. We really think we need to be in the business of handling news. It is not smart to be a supplement."

He considers careful planning vital.

"Newspapers that depend on stuff to fall in their laps at a convenient time are kidding themselves," he said.

Schwartz, a Georgia State University journalism educator and widely known newspaper consultant, offers a prescription for the future that includes healthy doses of sensationalism, sex and crime. He said it would include nude photos on page 3, a tradition for some English tabloids, if he thought readers in any American market would accept them.

"We'll have to get more into information — information in an entertaining way," said Schwartz, who said several P.M. papers have followed his advice and are enjoying healthy circulation gains.

Papers that want to flourish cannot take the news and themselves too seriously but "they will have to cover TV as if it was City Hall," he added.

Schwartz and Spencer agree on one point — readers want stories short and they hate jumps. Schwartz is more militant, saying readers won't take much of anything over 10 inches. Spencer believes longer stories have a place.

Schwartz said newspapers must maintain their credibility because "credibility is marketable," and reporters should strive for objectivity — as long as objectivity is not "another synonym for dullness."

He said the *New York Daily News* afternoon edition and the *Minneapolis Star* both tried to take a sophisticated approach to newspapering, aiming at an upscale audience — and both folded.

"P.M.'s should go exactly the opposite direction, (to become) a real mass medium. They will be doubleknit newspapers, and that's fine," he said.

One of his clients, *The Quad City Times*, has an A.M. product that hits both the Iowa and Illinois sides of the area hard while the P.M. concentrates on Iowa.

We began to emphasize stores of human drama without cutting back other coverage in any way," said Randy Heuston, the managing editor.

Sunday circulation is 84,529, up 2,140 from a year ago.

Combined daily circulation now is 64,319, compared to 63,527 in 1982, 63,626 in 1981 and 64,170 in 1980. The A.M. leads the P.M. 36,001 to 28,318, but Heuston notes that the market is "pretty well saturated for the P.M.," one reason the A.M. is active in Illinois.

Heuston is conservative about the future. He suggested that P.M.s can hold onto their readers, but he doubts they'll see much growth.

USA TODAY has the right idea, he adds, and learning from it is "a little more urgent in the afternoon."

Schwartz is more bullish. He thinks P.M.s can have a good future in part because they now are seen as underdogs and are more likely to take risks and promote themselves vigorously.

"Given the choice, people will take the more exciting paper — if you tell them that it is the more exciting paper," he said.

Hawking: A look at the human factor in getting newspapers to the readers

By Tom Marquardt
Managing Editor,
The Evening Capital
Annapolis, Maryland

Hawking newspapers is, for the most part, a segment of newspaper history that went out with hot type. But several afternoon (and morning) newspapers have found that yelling an occasional "Extra! Extra!" brings extra sales and a whole new editorial concept.

Newspapers that have experimented with "human vendors," as one publication calls them, agree that the most important ingredient for success is having a central location where a large audience of potential readers congregate. Although some publications hawk newspapers as regularly as daily, others have found greater success with special editions that coincide with a calamity or special event.

Seven afternoon newspapers have found that in a competitive market every newspaper counts, and hawking is an aggressive noontime effort that the morning papers can't compete with. In fact, afternoon newspapers are doing a better job of hawking newspapers because they can tap young carriers after school.

What does a person selling newspapers do that a vending machine cannot? First, managing editors report, they can encourage a person to buy that day's newspaper. Second, the carriers are a corps of public relations people.

Afternoon newspapers can learn something from daily papers like the *Democrat and Chronicle* and the *Times-Union*, two Gannett newspapers in Rochester, N.Y., where hawking is taken seriously.

Bob Singer, manager of single copy street sales, reports that an extra 2,000 final editions of the afternoon paper, the *Times-Union*, are hawked daily.

"Human vendors" are stationed "rain or shine" at four busy locations that include large centers of employment. Singer says the system works because the convenience of the vendors avoids the need for a person to stop at a store on the way home from work.

Singer admits that it helps when the editorial matter includes a breaking story. *Times-Union* Managing Editor Larry Beaupre says that the paper goes to a bolder display with its final editions.

"We design the page with an eye to the latest and the boldest," Beaupre says.

He says that editors look for a fresh angle and use color graphics in hopes of catching the eye of a passing pedestrian.

Both Singer and Beaupre rave about the success of the vendors, but differ somewhat on their benefits. Singer quotes the circulation figures, but Beaupre adds that the "visible presence" of the hawkers is equally important. In fact, Beaupre says he would like to see the vendors be more aggressive in actually hawking the papers.

The *Evening Independent* in St. Petersburg, Fla., has been hawking newspapers for 21 years and its circulation director, Dave Fluker, said he couldn't do without it.

About 100 to 120 young carriers peddle the evening newspapers after school at drug stores, grocery stores, shopping centers, industrial plants and even outside offices. Fluker says that this business accounts for 25 to 30 percent of his single sales.

Managing Editor Bob Stiff says he feels the carriers could be more aggressive in encouraging passersby to purchase a paper, but Fluker says each carrier is given a handbook on how to approach customers.

"They may repeat one of the headlines," Fluker said.

The hawked edition is no different than the one distributed to homes in St. Petersburg.

The morning newspaper in St. Petersburg does not hawk newspapers like the *Evening Independent* because the young carriers could not be used in the morning, Fluker says. He adds that the adult is not the type of person

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GAZETTE-JOURNAL PHOTO

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the newspaper wants to have on the street because they are likely to be more "rough looking" than a clean-cut youth.

Carriers at the *Evening Independent* are awarded prizes for selling the most newspapers.

Other newspapers have found that without a small, dense center of activity, regular hawking doesn't succeed. One afternoon newspaper even went so far as to adorn attractive girls with colorful T-shirts with the newspaper's name of them, but the only benefit it derived from the venture was the "visual presence" Beaupre has described.

However, the *Worcester* (Mass.) *Evening Gazette* has found that a novel approach to hawking papers sells newspapers and attracts positive attention.

Diane Benison, managing editor, says her newspaper has dressed up a special push cart with a large umbrella that is embossed with the newspaper's logo. Two carriers, donning special shirts and caps, push the cart around a popular downtown gathering place and sell their noon edition to a brown-bag, lunchtime crowd.

City Circulation Manager Don Bernier says that this effort sells about 50-75 extra copies a day, but he hopes to pick up another 2,000 to 3,000 when the afternoon daily soon begins a special street edition.

Benison says a special street edition, that will come out 30 minutes earlier, will revolutionize her editorial operation. Extra people and dramatic deadline changes will require several adjustments. Although her department is not altering the present noon edition for street-sale purposes, it will when it begins the 11:30 edition. Bolder headlines and different layouts will be incorporated in hopes of attracting passersby.

Bernier says that 6-10 street hawkers will take this edition to other points in the city in a greater effort to sell more newspapers.

The *Evening Gazette* has been losing circulation, although it is still larger than its morning rival. The hawkers are being used in hopes of extending the selling period and curbing the decline in circulation.

Benison says that the other benefit is that the cart and the hawkers give the lunchtime crowd something exciting and enhances the paper's community image.

Burl Osborne, managing editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, agrees that he doesn't think of hawkers "in shear numbers, but they do create a presence." He said that his newspaper's attempts to sell an "extra" on the attemped assassination for President Reagan was foiled when motorists became confused by hawkers selling papers at toll booths. "We finally gave them away," Osborne said.

Other newspapers also have found that the best time to sell an "extra" is when the news merits it. Trueman Farris, managing editor of the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, says that his morning newspaper has found the greatest success with hawking newspapers during the 1982 pennant race that involved the Brewers. Using their bulldog edition, the Sentinel sold all of its extra 10,000 copies in a few hours — all by way of shouting carriers.

Farris says that the front page had a strong ribbon headline like "Go, Brewers, go!" and a story that included color and scores.

But Farris agreed that the only reason street vendors succeeded in Milwaukee was the large congregation of people of the city's main street.

"We wouldn't have done this, but what made it feasible was a large crowd congesting in one place. It has to be natural," Farris advises.

One afternoon newspaper that was able to mobilize in time to inform its readers of a tragic accident was the *Kansas City Star*.

Managing Editor Dave Zeeck says that two years ago his staff moved quickly to cover the collapse at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, but found that it was better to assemble the stories in a 10-page wraparound that was hawked on Kansas City streets. That effort netted the sale of an extra 35,000 copies in one day.

And if you think delivering newspapers by word of mouth is a pain in the neck, consider the pains being suffered at the *Virgin Island Daily News* where 95 percent of the newspapers are distributed through street sales.

Publisher Ron Dillman said that 40-50 carriers hawk about 6,000 copies each day on all three islands, but this method of distribution is not by choice. "Home delivery is just about impossible because of the mountainous terrain," Dillman says.

And when it rains, it pours. "A lot of the carriers don't show up when it rains and our circulation drops off about 20 percent a day," he says. (Fortunately for Dillman, it doesn't rain much in the Virgin Islands).

Based on the past and present experience of these editors, the conclusions are unanimous: Hawkers can give afternoon newspapers a distinct advantage over their morning rivals if there is good organization, a good cause and a boldly displayed product.

Staffing round-the-clock: After all, news does happen 24 hours a day

By M. Lynne Holt
Managing Editor
The Phoenix Gazette

Staffing round-the-clock for afternoon papers is considered "the only way to go," by some managing editors.

Some declare it is impractical, too costly.

When properly managed it offers hefty savings in reduced overtime, keeps your publication on target and definitely avoids gaps in coverage, according to several proponents.

Of course, the other side of the coin is that papers with an already thin staff experience further dilution.

As might be expected, the majority of staffers assigned to the night scene generally object. Most staffers like their nights at home, supervisors know from experience, and they view night duty as something of a "punishment."

Thirty-six managing editors responded to a survey questionnaire (37 percent of the total queried) giving their views and approaches to 24-hour staffing in p.m. newsrooms:

☐ Only 10 report full-fledged 24-hour staffing.

☐ Nine of the 10 consider it a successful effort and one declined to answer.

☐ Eight believe round-the-clock staffing has contributed to their publication's growth or survival. Two say it is not measurable.

☐ One of those 10 papers publishes Monday through Friday; two are Monday through Saturday operations; and seven are seven-day publications.

Without 24-hour staffing, managing editor James Willse of the San Francisco Examiner feels his publication would have lost the timeliness and vitality needed to survive as a P.M..

This P.M. has an early (8 a.m.) street edition, a late (3 p.m.) final edition and several editions in between. In a sense, they found that round-the-clock staffing was necessary, if they were to stay on top of local news in the Bay Area's highly competitive market.

Managing editor Talmage A. Campbell of the *Aurora* (Ill.) *Beacon-News* says staffing through the wee hours . . . "gives us immediate response on police news and other emergencies which require coverage."

Campbell adds that he sees little value in maintaining a large staff between midnight and 5a.m. for his seven-day operation. Somtimes only one person is on duty.

Staffing on a 24-hour basis provides for meeting any eventuality, assures better continuity and control of stories, the survey shows.

Tom Jobson of the *Asbury Park* (N.J.) *Press* contends that such a

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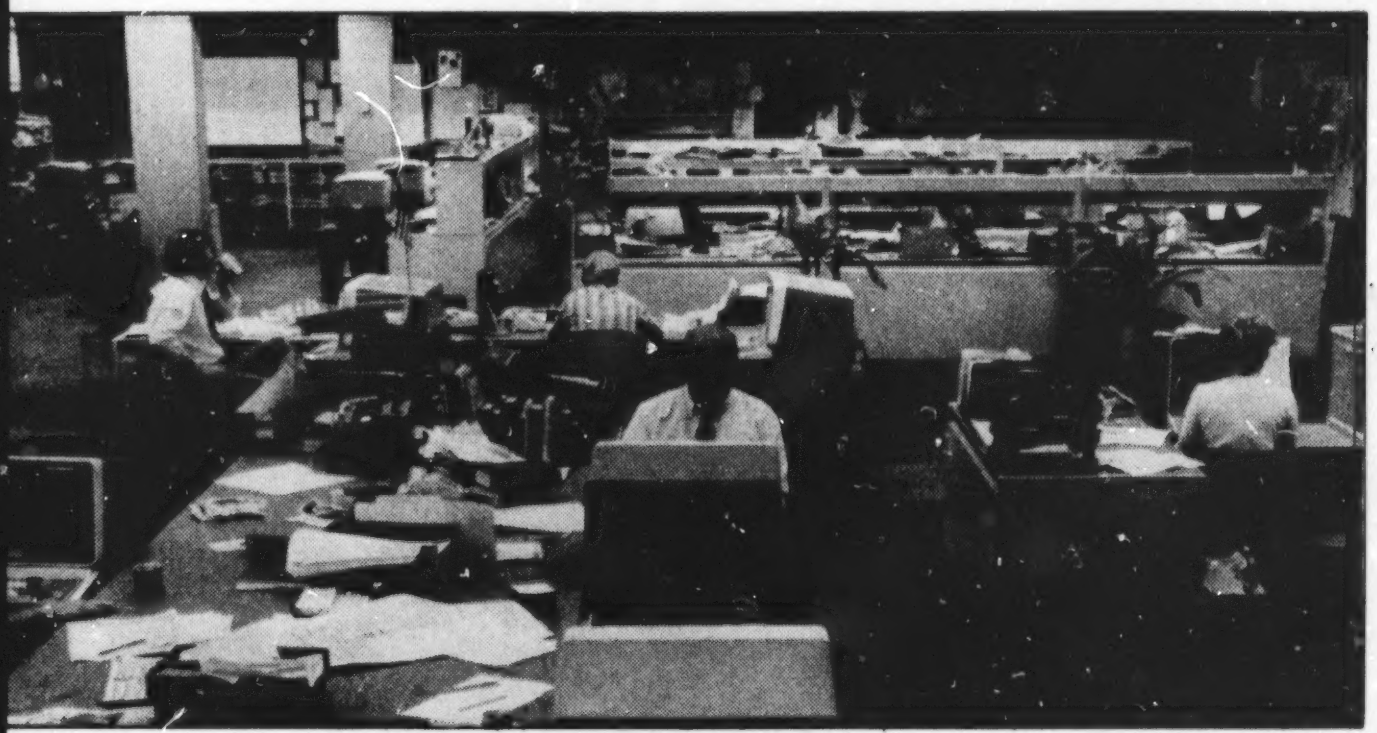

GAZETTE-JOURNAL PHOTO

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schedule makes his paper more competitive, fills traditionally built-in gaps and "gives us an edge over papers without 24-hour staffing."

As noted, dedication to a 24-hour staffing schedule doesn't necessarily mean all specialties of the newsroom are on deck all those hours.

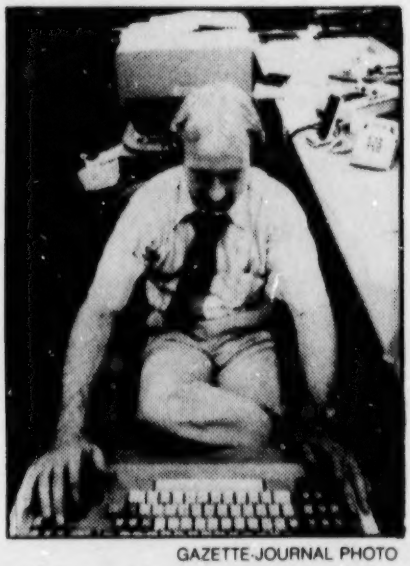
But don't think it's a solve-all move, warns Michael R. Fancher and his news management collegues at the *Seattle Times*, whose afternoon paper added a morning edition in March 1983.

"Chances are you will create fresh internal tensions," Fancher said. "Internal competition will be one outgrowth of round-the-clock staffing."

On the plus side, he notes there are possibilities for expanding the number of leadership roles and creating opportunities for more staffers. But he cautions that a breakdown in communications is likely to be a problem. There will be a definite dilution of the team feeling and your staffing resources will be too thin at times.

"But in the end you will have produced a better news product," he adds.

Richard W. Otte of the *Columbus* (Ohio) *Dispatch*, voices an observation that should get our attention: "I think our circulation has grown 11,000 in the last two years in part due to better hard news coverage."



GAZETTE-JOURNAL PHOTO

At least some of the credit goes to 24-hour staffing for those two years, he adds.

Chicago Sun-Times managing editor Gregory E. Favre says his seven-day operation has used 24-hour staffing "many years" in its never-ending quest to match competition.

His advice is: "Determine if it is feasible for your market. Then be sure of adequate staffing in all departments, production as well as editorial."

Among the 10 publications dedicated to 24-hour coverage here's where they have staffers on duty during the four specific six-hour work periods.

	CD	Reporters	Photo
☐ Midnight to 6 a.m.	10	7	6
☐ 6 a.m. to noon	10	10	10
☐ Noon to 6 p.m.	8	10	10
☐ 6 p.m. to midnight	6	10	10

A breakdown of staffing activities for these 10 afternoon newspapers with 24-hour operation shows the average has 63 percent of their numbers as reporters, 28 percent as copy editors and 11 percent photographers.

Four of the 10 papers hold one news conference daily; four schedule two; and two have a minimum of three. One management level staff with two formal conferences has two additional informal sessions.

Page remakes for these same publications range from a "token" number to 30 percent. Ten percent appears to be the average for remakes.

Earlier deadlines are posing threats of extended staffing to a number of the 25 managing editors who now staff less than 24 hours.

However, there is strong resistance to a move to 24-hour staffing by these managers who contend that to do so:

☐ Is simply staffing during unproductive hours.

☐ Means too much of the overnight copy "has to be rewritten" or "updated first thing next morning." This is particularly true with some of the smaller circulation papers.

☐ Creates a heavier load in the supervisory ranks. Or it could require additional supervisory positions.

☐ Risks the loss of timeliness in "covering today's news."

On the positive side, Asbury Park's Jobson says if this approach to coverage can be cost-justified, "It will be worthwhile the first time a major local story breaks at 3 a.m."

John Epperheimer, executive editor-news at the *Charlotte* (N.C.) *News*, says it is obvious that the midnight-6 a.m. shift is unpopular.

But he points out that that shift can be productive for work on feature sections. It's the time to watch the wires and to make the most of breaking news.

In summary, managing editors whose papers are staffed 24-hours daily are enthusiastic about its value to news coverage. They agree the biggest pitfall is employee dissatisfaction — a problem which must be dealt with for the operation to be successful.

Beyond that, they agree on little . . . and certainly not on the number of news conferences needed daily, the ratio of copy editors/reporters/photographers per shift, the number of remakes, and so forth.

More than 100 afternoon newspapers are growing — here's how they do it

By Bill Southerland
Springfield Daily News
and Springfield Leader and Press

This is a success story.

About afternoon newspapers.

More than 100 of them, alive and growing with the numbers to prove it certified by the most recent Audit Bureau of Circulation statistics. Some gaining ground in direct competition with morning newspapers.

And how they do it.

The winners are sold with formats that emphasize live local news, colorful front pages, sharp sports sections, predictable anchored content and anticipating what's about to happen.

In sheer volume, the record gain is owned by the *Philadelphia* (Pa.) *Daily News*, which added 37,857 readers to count 295,081. In growth percentage, the record appears to belong to the *Lawrenceville* (Ga.) *Gwinnett Daily News*, which added 3,188 readers to reach 23,058.

Impressive, but easy to explain. Philadelphia lost its other afternoon newspaper and Lawrenceville is in the nation's third fastest-growing county, an Atlanta suburb.

But how about the 7,012 new subscribers picked up by the *Progress Bulletin* in Pomona, Calif., between March 1982 and March 1983?

And what of the 4,633 readers the *Columbus* (Ohio) *Dispatch* gained or the 4,562 who began regularly reading the *Salt Lake City* (Utah) *Deseret News*, both selling in head-to-head competition against a separate morning newspaper?

Circulation gains of 3,619 were posted for the *Grand Rapids* (Mich.) *Press*, 3,330 for the *Quincy* (Mass.) *Patriot-Ledger*, 2,713 for the *St. Petersburg* (Fla.) *Independent*, 4,343 for the *Willoughby* (Ohio) *News-Herald*, and 3,377 for the *Santa Rosa* (Calif.) *Press Democrat*.

Is there a secret to this success?

Interviews this summer with editors speaking for at least four dozen growing afternoon newspapers isolated no magic formula, but everyone did mention local news with varying degrees of intensity and definitions for what constitutes local news.

Most often, the words "local news" were preceded with such terms as "hard" and "breaking" and "extensive" and "tightly written." Some of the same editors, however, also mentioned the numbers of wire services to which they subscribe for breaking news elsewhere.

The hot concept only now evolving in the newsrooms producing afternoon products that sell generates what its champions call "anticipatory journalism," telling readers what's going to happen in advance to get ahead of television and morning editions.

Managing Editor Henry Holcomb of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* was among those noting this trend away from explaining already-reported news toward a focus on future developments. "We've moved from a reactive news report to an anticipatory, probing news report," he said.

Color on the front page, exploding in volume after the introduction of Gannett's national *USA TODAY* newspaper, won credit for attracting many of the new afternoon readers. Editors said that seemed particularly true for younger readers who've grown up with television and have been influenced by video games.

The color used ranged from teaser display to process color photographs and full-color illustrations, but those who apply it regularly point to mounting circulation numbers to support their assertions it appeals to readers.

The *Columbus Dispatch* was among dozens winning a greater following with a new design.

"We developed a format that we adhere to very strictly" Editor Luke Feck said. "The same things appear in the same places day after day after day. We've found that with readers believing they have only limited time to spend with the newspaper, this stability is helpful."

Sports sections were considered important to their success by a majority of the editors interviewed, with many singling out participant sports coverage.

Even more cited attention to local sports of all sorts. "We take the zone approach, getting down to the kid league level and emphasizing the high school sports," Managing Editor Jim Standard of the *Oklahoma City Times* said.

And more than a few editors among the more than 100 working for more readers this year than last passed the credit for growth to the circulation department at their newspapers and effective promotion aimed directly at selling the afternoon editions.

Based on research including interviews with editors at more than four dozen newspapers, here is a profile of a composite afternoon U.S. newspaper that is gaining circulation:

☐ The front page is dominated by local news, with a strong use of process and spot color. It anchors a strong index, or at least teaser boxes, to let readers know what else is inside.

☐ The sports section is fairly large in proportion to the rest of the newspaper. Local, regional and state sports dominate the coverage, with plenty of results involving local teams. In one-cycle markets, results are particularly important.

☐ There are two editions of the newspaper, with the first edition probably having a press start of 11 a.m. and the second edition having a 1:30 press start.

☐ Street sales are increasing, but home delivery is the most important part of the readership.

☐ The circulation department is strongly managed, with strong promotion of the afternoon newspaper and effective home delivery service. Apartment dwellers are catered to in special ways.

☐ The paper is well-designed and packaged, although a fresh design and new packaging are not seen as a guarantee for increased circulation. If the paper has been redesigned recently, it focused on stronger packaging and better display of local news.

☐ Overall, the focus of the report is on anticipating the news about to

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break instead of only reaction to developments previously reported in morning newspapers or by broadcasters.

Otherwise, there's no magic formula. But these traits do seem to be apparent with the afternoon newspapers that are growing in circulation numbers:

An increasing use of color on the front page on a daily basis is common.

For instance, Tom Boght, executive editor of the *Decatur* (Ala.) *Daily*, said his newspaper prints full-color photographs or graphics on the front page each day.

The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* prints some color on the front page each day, although full-color photos usually run on the front only once or twice during the week

Press start times at these growing afternoon newspapers remain consistent. Most have not gained or lost time in recent years. Times fall in the 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. range. The typical two-edition newspaper lists a first edition press start about 11 a.m. and a second edition press start about 1:30 p.m.

Readership surveys have not been used extensively in recent years by most. But those who have done readership surveys recently use them as guidelines in improving their products. They also rely on feedback from readers and interaction with their communities.

Neil Morgan, editor of the *San Diego Tribune*, said recent surveys are telling him and his staff things about their readers that they suspected, but didn't have the hard data to support. "The rallying cry around here is, 'We're producing the most sophisticated country daily in America,' " Morgan said.

One part of the *Tribune* which Morgan said he thinks is helping his paper sell is a capsule package on Page 2A.

"We've got the best second page of any paper in the country, bar none," he said. It offers short summaries on national, state and local stories and a "Close to Home" column of short bits gleaned from reporters' beats. A prominent index calling attention to stories inside and two light comic strips are displayed as well.

Morgan said the *Tribune* places an emphasis on locally produced stories throughout the paper. "Our approach is tight, live, hard, with lots of short stories and lots of anticipatory stories," he said.

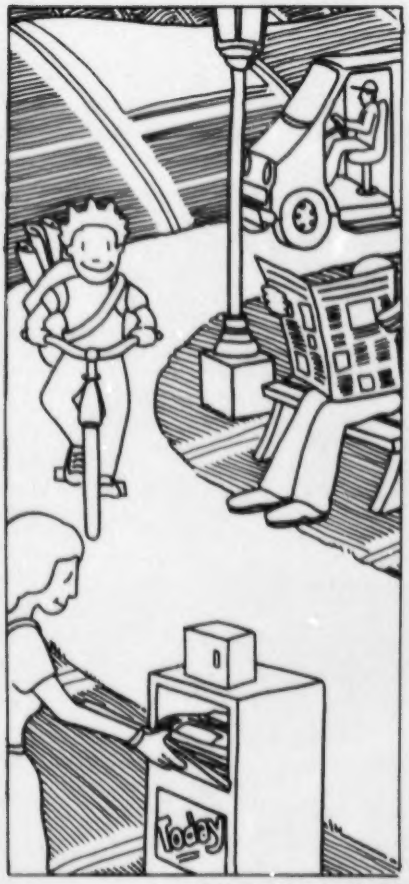
Street sales are growing in proportion to home delivery sales at

Afternoon newspapers show circulation gains

Who says P.M. circulation is falling? The Audit Bureau of Circulation listed 108 newspapers in April, 1983, which showed increases over April, 1982.

Oceanside (Calif.) Blade Tribune	27,581 to 29,916
Santa Cruz (Calif.) Sentinel	26,744 to 27,558
Santa Rosa (Calif.) Press Democrat	67,661 to 71,038
Las Cruces (N.M.) Sun-News	15,548 to 16,525
Willoughy (Ohio) News-Herald	32,114 to 36,457
Amarillo (Texas) Globe-Times	28,664 to 29,258
*Salt Lake City (Utah) Deseret News	72,048 to 76,610
*Danville (Va.) Bee	15,912 to 16,597
Decatur (Ala.) Daily	22,758 to 24,400
Gadsden (Ala.) Times	26,663 to 27,243
*Mobile (Ala.) Press	50,730 to 51,359
*The Alabama Journal (Montgomery)	22,517 to 23,285
*Anchorage (Alaska) Times	43,904 to 45,351
Sun City (Ariz.) News Sun	16,262 to 17,258
Yuma (Ariz.) Daily Sun and Arizona Sentinel	23,456 to 25,000
Hanford (Calif.) Sentinel	12,606 to 13,576
Marysville-Yuba (Calif.) Appeal-Democrat	20,809 to 21,209
Fullerton (Calif.) Daily News Tribune	21,607 to 22,634
Palm Springs (Calif.) Desert Sun	25,783 to 27,673
Pomona (Calif.) Progress Bulletin	33,979 to 40,991
Redding (Calif.) Record Searchlight	34,502 to 34,904
Roseville (Calif.) Press-Tribune	11,170 to 12,237
San Diego (Calif.) Tribune	126,308 to 126,743
Escondido (Calif.) Times-Advocate	32,004 to 33,275
San Luis Obispo (Calif.) Telegram Tribune	25,304 to 26,115
Stockton (Calif.) Record	53,969 to 54,179
Hermosa Beach (Calif.) Daily Breeze	85,417 to 87,376
*direct AM competition	

Ventura (Calif.) Star-Free Press	40,942 to 42,332
Canon City (Colo.) Daily Record	7,912 to 8,449
Longmont (Colo.) Times-Call	17,993 to 18,505
Manchester (Conn.) Journal Inquirer	38,037 to 40,024
New Britain (Conn.) Herald	40,504 to 41,333
New London (Conn.) Day	35,907 to 37,325
Stamford (Conn.) Advocate	29,620 to 30,555
*Daytona Beach (Fla.) News	30,467 to 31,157
*Jacksonville (Fla.) Journal	43,649 to 43,940
Leesburg (Fla.) Commercial	13,938 to 15,939
*Miami (Fla.) News	60,905 to 62,229
Ocala Fla.) Star-Banner	36,102 to 37,909
*St. Petersburg (Fla.) Independent	37,985 to 40,698
Stuart (Fla.) News	19,279 to 20,057
Winter Haven (Fla.) News-Chief	13,590 to 15,125
*Columbus (Ga.) Ledger	24,948 to 25,251
Lawrenceville (Ga.) Gwinnett Daily News	19,870 to 23,058
Bloomington (Ind.) Herald-Telephone	27,094 to 27,574
Hammond (Ind.) Times	69,982 to 70,853
Council Bluffs (Iowa) Nonpareil	18,669 to 19,282
Bowling Green (Ky.) Park City Daily News	19,513 to 20,082
Danville (Ky.) Advocate-Messenger	11,455 to 12,006
Elizabethtown (Ky.) News-Enterprise	13,738 to 14,639
Paducah (Ky.) Sun	29,608 to 31,242
Hammond (La.) Star	9,164 to 10,298
Lafayette (La.) Daily Advertiser	30,330 to 31,418
Opelousas (La.) World	14,192 to 15,409
Biddeford (Me.) Journal Tribune	13,662 to 14,152



GRAPHIC BY PAUL CARBO

most of the successful papers. One, however, reports a 23 percent gain in street sales. Baxter Homohundro, managing editor of the *Columbus* (Ga.) *Ledger*, links aggressive promotion to that jump.

Many papers, particularly the smaller ones, devote a considerable amount of space to local and regional sports. For example, Ron Martin, managing editor of the *Jacksonville* (Fla.) *Journal*, said the heavily local sports sections there have been a major factor in the paper's growth in a competitive market.

The 206,000-circulation *Columbus Dispatch* is also wrestling with the challenge. Sports "is the subject of some discussion around here right now," editor Feck said. "There are still some who say, 'If they don't sing the national anthem before they play, we shouldn't cover it.'

"However, we've recently hired an outdoor writer, and his stuff is immensely popular," Feck said. The *Dispatch* also places a growing emphasis on amateur sports.

Local news, both on the front page and throughout the rest of the paper, is mentioned most often as the strongest attribute of afternoon newspapers that are gaining circulation. For example, editors in Canon City, Colo, Hammond, La., Danville, Va., and Jacksonville, Fla., cite strong local news packages as a reason for increased circulation.

The *Jacksonville Journal* runs an all-local front page, according to Managing Editor Martin. Bill Nagle, managing editor of the *Hammond* (La.) *Star*, said more local enterprise reporting has helped circulation increase.

Readership surveys have helped the

(continued on page 16)

Annapolis (Md.) Capital	33,663 to 34,680
Lawrence (Mass.) Eagle-Tribune	53,529 to 54,982
New Bedford (Mass.) Standard Times	47,493 to 48,084
Quincy (Mass.) Patriot-Ledger	88,594 to 91,924
Salem (Mass.) News	29,995 to 31,077
Ann Arbor (Mich.) News	46,566 to 47,562
Grand Rapids (Mich.) Press	128,099 to 131,718
Kalamazoo (Mich.) Gazette	60,791 to 61,906
Mt. Clemens (Mich.) Macomb Daily	54,992 to 56,680
Muskegon (Mich.) Chronicle	44,560 to 45,681
Pontiac (Mich.) Press	72,258 to 73,868
Saginaw (Mich.) News	54,969 to 55,705
Mankato (Minn.) Free Press	26,853 to 27,2273
Rochester (Minn.) Post-Bulletin	38,930 to 40,110
St. Cloud (Minn.) Times	26,627 to 28,842
*Biloxi (Miss.) Daily Herald	38,372 to 39,559
Hattiesburg (Miss.) American	25,655 to 26,035
Boseman (Mont.) Chronicle	10,388 to 11,037
Dover (N.H.) Foster's Daily Democrat	21,293 to 22,660
White River Junction (Vt.) Valley News	14,616 to 15,476
Asbury Park (N.J.) Press	112,912 to 117,872
Bergen (N.J.) Record	148,387 to 149,853
Shrewsbury (N.J.) Register	30,309 to 33,064
Burlington (N.J.) County Times	42,679 to 44,260
Woodbury (N.J.) Times	28,131 to 29,005
*Albuquerque (N.M.) Tribune	44,735 to 45,875
Hobbs (N.M.) Daily News-Sun	10,633 to 12,226
Niagara Fall (N.Y.) Gazette	28,629 to 29,555
Hendersonville (N.C.) Times-News	12,744 to 13,960
Jacksonville (N.C.) Daily News	19,884 to 21,054
*Raleigh (N.C.) Times	33,338 to 34,471
Roanoke Rapids (N.C.) Herald	9,758 to 9,980
Matins Ferry (Ohio) Times-Leader	24,070 to 25,134
*Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch	202,220 to 206,853
Willoughby (Ohio) News-Herald	32,114 to 36,457
Lorain (Ohio) Journal	40,085 to 41,516
Mansfield (Ohio) News Journal	36,487 to 38,808
*Oklahoma City (Okla.) Times	85,004 to 86,843
Chambersburg (Pa.) Times Herald	19,994 to 20,456
Norristown (Ps.) Times Herald	30,214 to 32,144
*Philadelphia (Pa.) Daily News	257,224 to 295,081
West Chester (Pa.) Daily Local News	37,361 to 38,664
Rock Hill (S.C.) Herald	24,559 to 25,254
Sumter (S.C.) Daily Item	19,423 to 20,493
Jackson (Tenn.) Sun	33,687 to 35,027
*Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram	126,757 to 128,586
Irvin (Texas) Daily News	10,915 to 11,592
McAllen (Texas) Monitor	25,411 to 27,425
Midland (Texas) Reporter-Telegram	24,410 to 25,277
Richardson (Texas) Daily News	6,537 to 9,543
Ogden (Utah) Standard-Examiner	51,353 to 52,432
Bremerton (Wash) Sun	36,440 to 37,307
Martinsburg (W.Va.) Journal	19,068 to 20,882

*Direct A.M. competiton

(continued from page 15)
Oklahoma City Times improve its local news coverage. Managing Editor Standard said their surveys indicated a strong desire for local news.

"We've gone to intensive zoning, with lots of neighborhood and suburban news," Standard said.

Circulation departments are considered critical to increased circulation, prompting several editors to say that circulation department efforts were more important to increased sales rather than changes in the news product.

Don Springer, managing editor of the Bowling Green, Ky., *Park City Daily News*, said improved motor routes have helped circulation increase.

Ken Kish, assistant managing editor of the *Mount Clemens* (Mich.) *Macomb Daily*, said his circulation department successfully courted apartment house managers to allow delivery inside the buildings. This helped increase home delivery circulation dramatically, he said.

Carl Canon, general manager of the *Amarillo* (Texas) *Globe-Times*, said more aggressive sales and promotions, combined with improved home delivery service, were responsible for increased circulation in that city.

Managing editors in Hanford, Calif., Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Hobs, N.M., also associated improvements in their circulation departments with increased circulation.

In all, 108 newspapers listing afternoon distribution cycles were counted among those showing actual circulation gains measured by official Audit Bureau of Circulation standards. Of those, 18 are published in a community with direct head-to-head AM competition.

These numbers reflect pure growth in total numbers sold only.

The impact of such factors as circulation rate increases, reductions in territory served for afternoon delivery service and new competition that limited potential readership was not considered.

It is reasonable to surmise, however, that if 108 afternoon newspapers are showing circulation gains even more than that are experiencing overall circulation revenue increases despite declining penetration.

Some gains, such as those in the Philadelphia and Cleveland areas, were associated at least in part with closings at the *Philadelphia Bulletin* and the *Cleveland Press*, demonstrating that subscribers with an afternoon reading habit had turned to other evening newspapers.

Those often-cited failures in some metro markets, consolidations and conversions to morning cycles notwithstanding, the historical perspective in longer range circulation trends remain positive for evening newspapers.

Since 1946, a recent *Editor & Publisher* magazine study showed, afternoon circulation has grown from 43.6 million to 56.1 million while morning circulation has increased from 30.3 million to 33.1 million.

Between 1981 and 1982, however, the gain for morning newspapers was from 30.8 million to 33.1 million while the afternoon increase was slower, from 55.1 million, isolating P.M. problems as a recent development.

Measured by another standard, household penetration in their city zone or retail trading zone, afternoon newspapers also were ranked among the 32 that the American Newspaper Publishers Association found to have the higher numbers in the nation.

ANPA Director/Membership Development Harry W. Edwards said his questionnaire to the 32, drawing 14 responses, found no "pat formula" but did uncover as "key ingredients a quality local news product, high credibility, community involvement and dedication."

Most emphasized local news, but some responding to the ANPA questions said their readers also rely on them for national and international news so they subscribe to both major news services.

Among afternoon newspapers noted for their high penetration were the *Daily Record* in Wooster, Ohio, the *Register-Star* of Hudson, N.Y., the *Big Spring* (Texas) *Herald*, the *Ellwood City* (Pa.) *Ledger* and *The Daily News* of Longview, Wash.

Daily Record President Raymond Dix in Wooster (96 percent penetration) linked circulation success and "covering in considerable detail all the little communities in our area." Assistant Publisher W. Ryan Kegel at Ellwood City (83 percent penetration) mentioned civic involvement.

Publisher Thomas J. Watson in Big Spring (77 percent penetration) pointed to a need for "a balanced product" with only 25 percent of the audience reading a morning newspaper and executives in Hudson (83 percent penetration) noted they subscribe to both AP and UPI news services.

It also didn't hurt sales in Longview, Wash., where the newspaper is delivered to 82 percent of the homes, to have a nearby volcano exploding.

"We found there is nothing like a natural disaster of tremendous proportions to convince folks of the value of a daily newspaper," Editor and Publisher Ted Natt said.

His newspaper earned a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the 1980 explosions at Mount St. Helens, a peak some APME members may remember viewing from nearby Mount Hood on an excursion during the Portland convention.

The ANPA study involved 32 newspapers with the most impressive track records, but that list was compiled from an Audit Bureau of Circulation report showing nearly 250 dailies with penetration levels of at least 75 percent of their city zones.

And what of the future?

Editor Ned Morgan, whose *San Diego Tribune* is among those growing afternoon newsapers practicing "anticipatory journalism," said studies there "are confirming what we had a hunch about all along. So we're aiming at a young, well-educated, savvy, affluent, sophisticated audience."

They're buying.

The work on this report was coordinated by Bill Southerland, editor of the Springfield, Mo., *Daily News* and *Springfield Leader and Press*. Substantial contributions were made by Dave Doucette and Mike O'Brien, managing editors of those newspapers, and by Alan Boyer, a Kansas State University graduate student.

'Literary' journalism brings vitality while providing 'reading pleasure'

By Jon Franklin
Baltimore Evening Sun

The growing concern with "reading pleasure" among news managers is a natural response to a sea change in the profession of journalism. As our readers are increasingly assaulted with a confusing barrage of fact and data, they demand shifts away from the informational news story in favor of approaches that spin those facts into coherent tales with human meaning.

The storytelling techniques at issue are those of "literary" journalism, and while factual accuracy remains critical, the product is far more than fact. Today's well-written story offers the reader a coherent view of a situation and shows him (as opposed to telling him) how the facts relate to the human condition.

The techniques of literary journalism combine the finest aspects of both storytelling and news reporting. The finest and the most difficult. Mastering the new art of true storytelling requires years of training and practice.

Since editorial attitudes can make this process either much easier or much more difficult, I think the current consciousness-raising will inevitably be helpful. At the same time, I don't hear much from editorial offices that squares with my experience of what it's like in the foxholes of literary journalism.

Rarely, for instance, do I hear any formal editorial acknowledgment of the obvious fact that good writers, as opposed to good reporters, are devilishly difficult to get along with. They are prone to alternation rages and sulks, and are forever making themselves an exception to either this rule or that one. They bellyache even more than most reporters, and they are natural focal points for newsroom insurrections.

There are reasons for this that have nothing to do with "artistic nature." They have to do instead with a fundamental conflict between the writer and his editors, a conflict that begins the day the neophyte wordsmith interviews for his first job.

Consider that the most powerful force in the life of a young would-be writer is ego. He fancies himself worthy to be the lens through which his reader views the world and, in his secret fantasies, he compares himself to the likes of Steinbeck, Clemens, or even Shakespeare. Certainly that's stupid, but without these illusions the young writer won't survive.

But this ego force, while dominant, is also fragile. As Somerset Maugham put it, the act of creative writing presupposes wisdom — and yet the neophyte, if he's introspctive enough to be a writer in the first place, perceives at some semiconscious level that he is, at bottom, a callow romantic.

And he understands, by virtue of journalism school and through contact with the editors who he hopes will hire him, that there is absolutely no market for his sophomoric approach and his unfinished skills.

What's more, while the editors he talks to may espouse the principles of "good writing," it's usually pretty clear that the interest is superficial.

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Reading needn't be a chore

"People are reading, but they're not reading newspapers."

All editors hear this comment. Especially editors of afternoon newspapers. They also hear the comment that people don't have time to read even a good paper.

But if we put something called reading pleasure into our products, people will find the time to read us, just as they make time for mystery thrillers.

Readers want to be informed. Yet we make it such a chore. Few stories make it out to page one on the strength of the writing. God forbid such a piece might displace a choppy, incomplete "hard news" story.

Too many of our stories mash facts together with no more structure than a tottering inverted pyramid.

The term reading pleasure doesn't refer to fluffy features, titillation, gossip columns or the comics. It means going out of our way to get stories in the paper that readers can, and should, get involved with and identify with.

Newspapers in general — and PMs in particular — must return to the basics of storytelling, says Jon Franklin, Pulitzer Prize-winning feature writer for the Baltimore Evening Sun.

Franklin has done his share of rewrite and straight-news beat reporting, and this experience helped make him an innovator on the paper, a developer of more compelling forms and techniques.

The best way to pleasure a reader, Franklin believes, is to slice into an issue in human terms, placing true-to-life characters in suspenseful situations. And pick your spots: go all out on stories that have significance beyond the immediate facts. This, in brief, is what Franklin calls "literary journalism" — using techniques of the fictional short story to get at significant news about the human condition today.

"Readers don't want just more data," Franklin says. "They want to be wiser, to know what news means. And they want to be moved, to experience the emotions that so often get chopped out of newspaper stories."

Franklin, the co-author of three books who also teaches feature writing at the college level, was asked to expand on his ideas about the art of newspaper storytelling.

George Rodgers
Assistant Managing Editor
Baltimore Evening Sun

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The typical city editor doesn't have time to deal with the complexities of the creative process, and no stomach for the inevitable boat-rocking that accompanies it. He's interested, by necessity, in filling his pages with passable copy and getting the damned stuff down to the composing room before the final edition closes. This is simply the way of the world.

Now the young writer may be a callow romantic, but that doesn't mean he's a dummy. So he doesn't tell the editor that he is really more interested in immortality, and in development of literary style, than he is in deadlines or the good of the newspaper as a whole.

So the neophyte who gets the job is the one who convinces an editor that he's not really a writer at all, but a reporter, and that his deepest desire is to do whatever the editor wants him to do. The relationship between writer and editor begins in deceit.

As his career progresses, the conflict between the writer and his editor grows apace. The internal pressures on a writer always push him toward writing better — after all, he's competing with Shakespeare. He knows that it is only by stretching his abilities, and by constant experimentation, that he can improve his writing and, he hopes, his lot in life.

To a writer-in-training, each story becomes a testing ground for technique. He is always trying to make the facts signify more to make the web of his story stronger and more compelling, and to provide ever more layers of context to his story.

The external pressures, however, are quite the opposite. The journalistic world, lacking any generally agreed-upon criteria for reader impact, measures productivity in terms of inches.

The war consists of small battles. Perhaps the editor, say, wants a story by Thursday. It doesn't have to be spectacular; he will be perfectly satisfied with a readable piece.

The writer, seeing an opportunity to do something deeper with the story, resolves to try a difficult approach. But the approach is risky, and the story might not be finished by Thursday.

If he tells the editor what he's about to attempt, the editor will order him to do it the easy, dependable, good-enough way. The writer solves this dilemma in the customary fashion. He doesn't tell the editor.

Perhaps he meets the deadline, in which case all is well and the editor is pleased. But perhaps he does not or, worse yet, perhaps he has reached beyond his ability and he bogs down completely. By the time the editor knows something untoward is happening, the writer has turned a perfectly routine job into an unresolvable crisis of confidence.

It takes years, and many such crises, before the writer develops the skill and confidence to produce a marketable product with any reliability at all. And as the years pass, the relationship between that writer and his editors tends to grow increasingly strained.

The writer, for his part, characteristically develops a distrust that borders on paranoia.

The editors tell him, for instance, that they are more interested in quality than in quantity, and yet the writer can't help but notice that, the more he produces, the less likely he is to find himself working weekends or covering stupid stories that originate in the mind of the editor's wife.

He may also become convinced that his newspaper stylebook was written specifically to deny him the literary flexibility he needs to excel. On my own newspaper, for instance, generations of feature writers struggled to write profiles in which the character could never be mentioned by his or her first name. It had to be Mr. Smith.

Try this, if you will, on a story about a derelict alcoholic. I dare you.

As the writer becomes more proficient, he becomes more and more enmeshed in the intricacies of characterization, theme, focus, pacing, complication-resolution compatability, and other technical aspects of his trade. He recognizes that the technical mastery of these concepts spell the difference between success and failure for him.

But the problems that arise are rarely of any interest to his editors.

I remember being assigned to do a first-day-of-spring story after a particularly mild winter. I spent three days working on it, and produced a particularly bright piece of copy, written in obituary style, about "the late winter." I was very proud of it.

As it went through the city desk, an editor there became concerned that it didn't contain the day's weather forecast. He remedied the problem by writing a straight-news weather report and dropping it in, without transition, between the lead and the bridge.

Such are the tales that writers pass around at the corner bar, an endless list of frustrations and atrocities, matched only by the stories that editors must tell, behind closed conference door, about prima donna feature writers.

And so it is that throughout his long, almost endless period of apprenticeship the feature writer, to the puzzlement and chagrin of his editors, struggles to grow beyond the bounds of adequacy and the perceived needs of his newspaper. In his quest for excellence in a deadline-ruled world the writer is by definition a troublemaker, and the relationship between him and his editor is fundamentally adversarial.

I am aware that this view is an uncomfortable one for news managers, because it implies that editors hire neophyte young writers only when the writers hoodwink them into doing so, and that the hapless editor, having been hoodwinked, is inevitably destined to pay for his error with copious amounts of gastric acid.

But I submit that the adversarial relationship is a reality which, if [illegible]d, will make the elusive goal of [illegible]ng pleasure" an impossibility. [illegible]ors are as Pavlovian as anyone else, as Pavlovian even as the writers they hope against hope to "manage." Confronted by writers who are

suspicious and uncooperative, it is only natural for the editor to turn elsewhere for solutions to his problems.

His problems, these days, are nicely summed up in anemic circulation figures.

From the point of view of a writer who has survived the neophyte years and come out on the successful end, the problem is obvious and the future bright. The times have changed, and with it the demands, and, for the writer, good times are here again. The public wants us to tell them a story, and is willing to pay handsomely for it.

What's more, because the dues are so high, and because newspapers have unconsciously made them even higher, there is precious little competition. It is a wonderful age in which to be an established feature writer.

Editors, however, rarely see it that way. Like the managers of the automobile industry in the 1970s, they prefer to focus not on the deficiencies of their product but on something easier to understand and deal with — packaging.

Advertising, display, circulation campaigns and whatnot have their purposes, clearly. But those things will not hold back changing times; nor will they convince an already-confused reader that he wants to be yet more confused.

It appears to many writers that news managers, in their desire to avoid dealing with writers and their puzzling, unpredictable product, go so far as to willfully misinterpret much of the evidence that comes their way.

Readership surveys that purport to show a reader desire for short, superficial stories is an example that comes to mind.

Now I grant you that the average reader will not read the jump on the average story. But look at the average story! It is front-loaded with information, in the traditional inverted pyramid style, and the tail of the story consists primarily of supporting data and detail. Why should the reader turn to page A-16, unless he has a particular interest in the subject?

At the same time such stories, concentrating as they do on facts for the sake of facts, tend to give the reader information while failing to enlighten him concerning where that information fits into the world that the reader must deal with day in and day out. So as existence becomes more complex, and the swirl of events more confusing, there is less and less interest in the straight news story in general.

The more useful stories, to today's reader, are the ones that focus on the unfolding drama of how human beings cope with a changing, inscrutable and often unjust world. These stories offer the reader examples of how others deal with the world — examples he can either reject or incorporate into his own attitudes.

Such stories, being by nature human dramas, lend themselves to the complication/resolution form — boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl. This is a form that produces tension, sucks the reader in, and draws him along. If the story is done correctly, the reader will turn to page A-16 without even thinking about it; there's something there he wants to read.

So, instead of adopting the self-serving conclusion that readers won't jump, it would be far more constructive for news managers to ask themselves why they won't jump, and how we can print stories that are worth reading all the way through.

If the quality of writing is to be improved at editorial initiative, the editors themselves must take a greater interest in the pressures and the dilemmas that confront the writer-in-training. Only in this fashion can editors determine where and how they can make a difference and where, in all honesty, they can't.

I'll never forget the time Phil Heisler, the former editor of *The Evening Sun*, decided he liked a story I did about a horse. But he did more than compliment me; he asked himself why he liked the story. He liked it, he told me, because, "It had a beginning, a middle, and an end."

That observation, simple as it was, set me wondering about literary structure. I'd studied it in high school, but now I went back and read old primers on the subject and was soon engrossed in complication-resolution theory. One thing led to another until, many years later, I set out to do a series of experimental stories that had "beginnings, middles and ends" — which is to say complications, narrative bodies, and resolutions. The fifth such experiment was Mrs. Kelly's Monster, my piece about brain surgery which won the Pulitzer, was printed in the *Readers' Digest* and served as the impetus of the Doubleday book, *Not Quite a Miracle*.

In making this simple observation about my horse story, Phil was in effect acting as a mirror. He wasn't telling me what I should do, but rather what I had done. The average writer, young or old, is frequently overwhelmed by the complexity of the forest he's trying to navigate through, and the editor who serves as a mirror helps him orient himself.

The story also serves to point out that the most desperate needs of the young writer are really quite modest. And yet, when those needs are met, the payoffs can be spectacular.

In pursuit of those rewards, it's important to recognize and accept that the writer, aside from being receptive to criticism that furthers his own understanding and skill, could care less about the editors' problems. It is the writers' ambition, regardless of what he tells his editor, to write better and better copy.

He is a romantic, remember? He can't easily be deterred from his dream, or harnessed to the traditional news style.

What the editor can do, and what the successful ones are best at, is not changing the writer's dream but rather latching onto it, nurturing it, and promoting it. If that requires time and attention, and perhaps a slightly different newsroom value system, I think it pays off in better writers and stories with greater reader impact.

The truth, to me, is that the newspaper business is desperately in need of a dream. And it is, in the end, the techniques of Shakespeare, and not of Woodstein, that can be guaranteed to capture and sustain reader interest on a day-to-day basis.